DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 397 CE 800 089

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TITLE Career Development in Adult Basic Education. Overview: ERIC Digest No. 27.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE [83]
CONTRACT NIE-C-400-81-0035
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Basic Education; *Adult Students; *Career Development; *Career Education; Guidelines; Literature Reviews; Program Content; Program Design; Student Characteristics; Student Needs; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS ERIC; Fact Sheets; PF Project; Program Objectives

ABSTRACT

The results of surveys on adult basic education (ABE) student characteristics and program goals are presented in this digest along with recommendations on career development in ABE. Topics include: (1) results of a survey of directors of ABE projects which ranked the importance of 10 goals of ABE (Young and others 1980); (2) statistics from a survey on the characteristics of ABE students (Young and others 1980); (3) a description of the characteristics of illiterate adults (Ulmer and Dorland 1981); (4) a discussion of the career development needs of ABE students; (5) seven suggested goals for ABE career development programs (Deems 1983); (6) a list of 14 content areas which need to be addressed in order to achieve those goals; and (7) brief recommendations on how ABE career development programs should be organized including delivery models, staff qualifications, physical facilities, instructional materials, consultants, and follow-up services. A three-item bibliography of references which are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system is included. (DC)

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by

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OVERVIEW

ERIC® DIGEST NO. 27

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

What Are the Goals of Adult Basic Education?

Adult basic education programs are designed to meet several adult needs. When asked to rate the importance of specific adult basic education goals (Young and others 1980), directors of local ABE projects rated these goals in the following order from most important to least important:

- Obtain basic knowledge (reading, writing, mathematics)
- Enable completion of General Educational Development (GED) examination
- Increase competency in the English language
- Increase self-confidence of students
- Obtain education necessary for enrolling in other programs, vocational training, and so forth
- Increase ability to cope with adult life roles and problems
- Obtain better employment, a salary increase, and so forth
- Enable completion of eighth-grade equivalency
- Prepare students to meet special short-term goals (e.g., complete job applications or obtain a driver's license)
- Enable socialization among adults and/or facilitate their making friends

Who Are the Adult Basic Education Students?

A recent survey (ibid.) indicates that 41 percent of ABE students are male, while 59 percent are female. The largest age group is the twenty-two- to thirty-four-year-olds at 43 percent, with 22 percent being sixteen to twenty-one years old, 28 percent being thirty-five to fifty-nine years old, and 7 percent being over sixty years old. By ethnic group, 43 percent are white, 27 percent are black, 21 percent are Hispanic, 8 percent are Asian/Pacific, and 1 percent are Native American. Seventy-eight percent are nonimmigrant, while 22 percent have immigrated to the United States within the past ten years. About one-third have completed seven to nine years of formal schooling, another third have completed ten to twelve years of formal schooling, about 20 percent have completed less than six years, and 13 percent have completed more than twelve years of formal schooling.

Ulmer and Dorland (1981) provide the following description of typical illiterate adults. Among other characteristics, illiterate adults: (1) have a low concept of their own self-worth; (2) do not necessarily share the same values as middle-class citizens; (3) are usually the last to be hired and the first to be fired; (4) are targets for replacement by automation; (5) lead a survival-based existence, reflecting a "live-for-today" syndrome; (6) generally do not see value in returning to school; and (7) are unaware of the changing environment because their own immediate world seems unchanged.

Career Development Needs of Adult Basic Education Students

Since career development is a life-long process, adults need career development assistance. ABE students, who are apt to be from disadvantaged backgrounds, have specific career development needs. When compared with their more advantaged counterparts, the disadvantaged are less apt to be employed, to be employed in satisfying career options, and to be earning substantial incomes. ABE students may have had experiences that negatively affect their career development. They may lack basic skills, have had unsatisfying early vocational experiences, or have low self-esteem due to their lack of success in previous experiences. Because of these factors, special areas need to be stressed in career development programs for adult basic education students.

Goals of ABE Career Development Programs

At present, ABE students report that the programs have helped them improve their self-concept (84 percent) and have strengthened their basic skills, including reading, mathematics, and writing (over 65 percent). However, only 18 percent report that ABE programs have helped them secure jobs. Helping ABE students develop career development skills is important since at least 50 percent of these students are unemployed, many who are employed are underemployed, and many students view ABE as a route to further training that will prepare them for employment. Deems (1983) suggests that the goals for ABE career development programs are to help students—

1. understand, accept, and appreciate themselves, including their values, skills, strengths, abilities, interests, and vulnerabilities;
2. think about and establish career goals and objectives that are realistic and include both short- and long-term goals;
3. understand the world of work, including job requirements, the changing demand for occupations, and the effects of occupational characteristics on other life roles;
4. identify life-style and career options, and make realistic decisions based on intentional career planning;
5. develop plans to implement career goals;
6. acquire the skills needed to reach selected career goals; and
7. implement career plans.

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What Is the Content of ABE Career Development Programs?

To achieve these career development goals, programs need to address several content areas including:

- Technological developments and their influence on work
- Personal skills that support successful employment
- Work-related values that are important to the individual
- Life goals and plans
- Work and life style conditions that are preferred by the individual
- Individual temperaments, interests, abilities, and vulnerabilities
- Methods of overcoming possible barriers to employment such as health, family, and financial barriers
- Occupational information and career exploration activities
- Grooming and appearance
- Job opportunities
- Job interview skills
- Resume writing
- Job application forms
- Work adjustment skills

How Should ABE Career Development Programs Be Organized?

Several models for the delivery of career development programs are available for use in ABE. These include the integration of career development goals into existing curriculum areas, the development of specific career development courses, and the use of ongoing individual and small group career development activities. A comprehensive career development program that meets the career development needs of ABE students may well require a combination of several of these program models.

Staff qualifications include graduate-level training in career development and counseling, or previous experience in intensive career development programs. Staff members should have a belief in the potential of ABE students and have demonstrated the ability to motivate these students in other learning situations. A designated program coordinator should be responsible for guiding program development and implementation. Clerical support is also needed to help produce learning materials and to type resumes or letters of application for students.

Physical facilities need to provide adequate space to accommodate several different activities including individual counseling, small group meetings, and independent study activities. One approach is to establish a career development center that has large space to house career information materials, and small rooms for individual and group sessions.

Each ABE student should have his or her own copy of the basic, instructional materials since the information recorded will be used in future career planning activities. Support materials might include career information resources (both print and media), inventories and assessment instruments, information on educational opportunities within the local community, and sample job application forms. Videotape equipment is important for use in practicing communication and job interviewing skills. A computer terminal or microcomputer can be used for career exploration via a computer-based career information system.

Several types of consultants are needed to support the program, including workers from specific occupational areas, employers and personnel directors to help in developing job interview skills, and admissions counselors from other educational institutions to describe programs and enroll students in other educational programs.

In addition to direct services to ABE students during the program, it is helpful to provide follow-up services that allow former students to meet to discuss the job-seeking process after program completion. Also, some programs have found it helpful to have parallel family support groups where family members can meet to discuss the changes occurring and their reactions to these changes.

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This ERIC Digest was developed by Juliet Miller, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. NIE-C-400-81-0035. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.

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